

VZCZCXRO1077  
RR RUEHRG  
DE RUEHSO #0251/01 0661740  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 071740Z MAR 06  
FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4615  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 5775  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0165  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC 2296  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 1836  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 2069  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1583  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 2617  
RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 2738  
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 6866  
RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 2420

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SAO PAULO 000251

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/BSC AND OES/SAT  
STATE PASS TO USTR FOR MSULLIVAN  
NSC FOR SUE CRONIN  
NASA FOR DKRIEGER

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [TSPA](#) [PREL](#) [EAIR](#) [PGOV](#) [BR](#)  
SUBJECT: Brazil's Cosmonaut

¶1. SUMMARY: In late March, Brazil plans to send its first astronaut into space aboard a Russian rocket. This event appears to be the first step in space-related cooperation between Brazil and Russia. Despite the historic significance of this flight for Brazil, the director of Brazil's National Space Agency has derided the event as a mere "publicity stunt." END SUMMARY.

-----  
HITCHING A RIDE TO SPACE  
-----

¶2. On March 29, Air Force Lt. Col. Marcos Cesar Pontes will become Brazil's first person in space when he flies on a Russian Soyuz rocket to the International Space Station. Pontes will blast off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan with Russian astronaut Pavel Vinogradov and American astronaut Jeffrey Williams and spend eight days on the International Space Station before returning to Earth with the outgoing two-man crew.

¶3. Pontes began training in 1998 in the U.S. After the GOB reevaluated their participation in the international space station, Pontes' participation with the U.S. crew was put on an indefinite hold. Press reports indicate that in 2005, the GOB began discussions with Russia about the possibility of Pontes traveling aboard a Russian rocket. During a November 2004 visit to Brazil, Russian President Vladimir Putin pledged Russian support to help Brazil resume its space program and restore its rocket-launching base, which was destroyed by a rocket explosion in 2003 that killed 21 people. Brazil and Russia signed an agreement for Ponte's space mission during Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's visit to Moscow in October 2005.

¶4. During the mission, Pontes will conduct nine scientific experiments in the sphere of nano-technology, bio-technology, and plant behavior in micro-gravitational conditions. A former test pilot, Pontes, who is currently making final preparations for the flight at the Star City astronaut training center outside Moscow, told reporters, "I started as a technician on the railroad. My first dream was to join the air force and fly fighter planes. It wasn't until I was an Air Force pilot that I began to dream about space."

¶5. The last person to buy a ticket on a Soyuz rocket was American entrepreneur and scientist Gregory Olsen, who returned safely to

earth October 2005. Olsen paid an estimated USD 20 million for the trip.

-----  
THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FREINDSHIP  
-----

¶16. The low price Brazil paid to Russia (supposedly USD 10.5 million, versus Olsen's USD 20 million) was not just a friendly gesture. According to Brazilian news reports, the Russian government considers Pontes' flight the first stage of cooperation between the two nations in the space sector and expects to win the bid for the construction of a Brazilian satellite. The cooperation includes negotiations to use the Brazilian Alcantara facility (located in the northeastern state of Maranhao close to the equator) to launch Russian commercial satellites. According to Moscow, the Alcantara base needs about USD 300 million worth of upgrades in order to become a launch center. While not committing to the full amount needed to refurbish the site, the Russians are considering providing financial assistance for the upgrades.

-----  
BRAZILIAN SPACE FLIGHT IS A MERE "PUBLICITY STUNT"  
-----

¶17. COMMENT: The new director of the Brazilian Aerospace Technology Center, Air Force Lt. Brigadier Carlos Augusto Leal Velloso, said in a recent interview with daily Folha de Sao Paulo that the Pontes's upcoming space flight is a mere "publicity stunt" that "will bring no scientific benefit to Brazil." In an election year that has seen President Lula up and down in the polls, it isn't hard to imagine who the "publicity stunt" is meant to benefit. This may be the final word in a mission that may ultimately be described as

SAO PAULO 00000251 002 OF 002

merely "one small step" for Brazil. END COMMENT

¶18. This cable was cleared/coordinated with Embassy Brasilia.

McMullen